1917
H65

Hobler

Marsilio Ficino, Philosopher, and Head of the Platonic Academy of Florence

The person charging this material is responsible for its return to the library from which it was withdrawn on or before the **Latest Date** stamped below.

Theft, mutilation, and underlining of books are reasons for disciplinary action and may result in dismissal from the University.

UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS LIBRARY AT URBANA-CHAMPAIGN

BUILDING USE ONLY

FEB - 6 1974

FEB - 6 1974

BUILDING USE ONLY

BUILDING USE ONLY

OCT 19 1979

OCT 19 1979

L161—O-1096

MARSILIO FICINO, PHILOSOPHER, AND HEAD OF THE PLATONIC ACADEMY OF FLORENCE

BY

HARRIET WELLS HOBLER

A. B. Rockford College, 1882

THESIS

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the

Degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

IN HISTORY

IN

THE GRADUATE SCHOOL

OF THE

UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS

1917

1917
H65

UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS

THE GRADUATE SCHOOL

June 1 1917

I HEREBY RECOMMEND THAT THE THESIS PREPARED UNDER MY SUPERVISION BY Harriet Wells Hobler

ENTITLED Marsilio Ficino, Philosopher, and Head of the Platonic Academy of Florence

BE ACCEPTED AS FULFILLING THIS PART OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF Master of Arts

Paul V. B. Jones
In Charge of Thesis

Everts B. Greene
Head of Department

Recommendation concurred in:*

Committee on Final Examination*

*Required for doctor's degree but not for master's.

24 Dec. 17 Gilley

376569

UIUC

TABLE OF CONTENTS

PROLOG: Two portraits of Marsilio Ficino.

INTRODUCTION: The study of Greek in the fifteenth century.

CHAPTER I: Ficino's early dedication to the study of Plato; his education; devotion to the work; Cosmo de' Medici's gifts to him; his study of Greek; his letters; his friends; intimate friendships; loyalty to Medici family; habits; personal appearance; character; his father, who lived with him; foreign friends; offers of honor and homes; death and burial.

CHAPTER II: The Florentine Academy; banquets, Landino's description of them; course of instruction in Academy; description of assembly rooms; importance; spread of movement.

CHAPTER III: Ficino's works; produced under Lorenzo's patronage; Dialogues of Plato; Enneads of Plotinus; Teologica Platonica; Orphic Hymns; other writers of Neo-Platonic School; St. Paul; other works of Plato; work outside of study; "School of Athens;" his letters; Dionysus the Areopagite; first complete edition.

CHAPTER IV: Quattrocento a period of discovery; view of Plato; adherence to Plato's philosophy; prefers

Plotinus as source of Plato's views; harmony of Platonic and Christian ideas of nature; of God and Source; angels and souls of spheres; purification and purgatory; philosophy to supplement doctrine; multiple nature of soul; compromise on beauty; danger of mysticism; attempt to harmonize all religions and all philosophies; Mirandola and Landino; aim to emphasize duty of man as taught by Plato; Geiger's estimate of Ficino; Savonarola; results in Italy and Germany of philosophy; allegorical harmony; Michelangelo; discovery of the new world.

Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2013

http://archive.org/details/marsilioficinoph00hobl

MARSILIO FICINO

HUMANIST AND PHILOSOPHER

PROLOG

The monotonous drone of the priest came to us as we entered the great and gloomy Church of Santa Maria Novella, where matins were being conducted for the faithful. We tiptoed silently down the side of the nave and around the high altar to the Spanish Chapel behind it. We had come thither to see the Florentines of the fifteenth century as Ghirlandajo represented them in his famous delineation of incidents in the life of the Blessed Virgin and of St. John the Baptist. There, in all their bravery and strength, he puts them before us as he saw them each day on the streets of Florence, in the market places, and in their carnival processions. This vast series of frescoes ranks not only as Ghirlandajo's masterpiece, but as one of the most remarkable and important works of the Renaissance.

Here before us were men and women whose names tell of the glory of Florence in her greatest period: men of action, men of learning; and women whose attainments were little less than theirs. Most conspicuous, as is fitting, are the members of the Tournabuoni family,

for Giovanni, its head, furnished the means for all the restoration and decoration of this Chapel.

Our interest here, above all, is the human interest, the groups of contemporary Florentines. On our right we see the great ladies of the Tournabuoni family, taking part, in a most natural and lifelike manner, in the events of the life of the Blessed Virgin. On the left, in scenes from the life of St. John the Baptist, appear groups of nobles, of artists, of scholars, of humanists. Another time we may study the rich and varied architecture, the elaborate combinations of colors still vivid through the smoke and dust of centuries; now, however, we concentrate our attention on one particular group in the lower left hand corner of the first scene, "Zacharius in the Temple," where in the foreground are four figures in half length, standing somewhat detached, and conversing. They are, as Vasari quaintly puts it, "the most learned men then to be found in all Florence." He goes on to say "the first is Messer Ficino, who wears the dress of a canon; the second, in a red mantle with a black band around his neck, is Cristoforo Landino. The figure turning toward him is the Greek Demetrius[1] and he who, standing between them, somewhat raises his hand, is Messer Poliziano;

[1]Chalcondylas. Blashfield thinks it is rather that of Gentile de' Becchi, Bishop of Arezzo and instructor of Lorenzo de' Medici.

all of whom are most lifelike and animated portraits."[1]

Here, then, are three great Humanists, leaders of thought in the Medicean period, supported, as it were, by the Church, in the person of the Bishop of Arezzo. Landino, expositor of Aristotelianism, editor of Dante, and one who, in his Disputationes, gives a most charming contribution to our knowledge of the life of his time as well as a definite picture of the meetings of the Platonic Academy; and Gentile de' Becchi of Urbino, instructor of Lorenzo de' Medici in his early youth, but, at this time, Bishop of Arezzo, noted Humanist and scholar. Here is, too, Angelo Ambrogio Poliziano, better known perhaps as Politian, the truest scholar as well as greatest poet of his age. And finally we come to the last of the group, though first in interest to us, Marsilio Ficino, translator and interpreter of Plato and head of the Platonic Academy thruout its brief life. Well has Ghirlandajo set before us that gentle, learned, idealistic Platonist! His delicate, slender physique, though hidden in a measure by his clerical garb of a Canon, speaks of the student and devoted priest; his refined intellectual features, of the philosopher and teacher. There he stands, at the left of the group, his head turned over his right shoulder

---

[1] Vasari, Blashfield-Hopkins edition, Vol. II, p. 181.

as he looks forth at us. By his subtly dominating personality, he easily attracts our attention and one may readily recognize that power which made him the foremost humanist of Florence and led Ghirlandajo to place him in this conspicuous place among the eminent men of Florence. This great fresco was painted between 1486 and 1490 and Ficino is seen at the height of his popularity and influence. As he appears here in intimate converse with other learned men of the day, so may he be recalled to life as in daily intercourse he threaded the busy streets of Florence or sauntered through the wooded hills of Careggi.

For another view of this great philosopher, the Duomo may be visited, where rests against the wall in the right aisle the marble bust executed shortly after Ficino's death, by Andrea Ferrucci. Here is distinctly the mystic dreamer, "caught in a rare moment of inspiration, as on that wonderful day when he closed his finished Plato and saw young Pico della Mirandola before him."[1] Here may be noted the long slender fingers of a musician, holding half open the book he loved so well. His face, turned to the right, is presented to us in three-quarter view; the gentle, melancholy droop of the mouth, the trust and devotion of the uplifted eyes are

---

[1]Catholic Encyclopedia, Ficino.

in sharp contrast with the strong and prominent nose and the deeply furrowed brow. The features clear-cut and rarely fine, tell of the nobleness, strength, and purity of purpose that so distinctly marked his life. This is perhaps not so true a portrait, being idealized, but in its idealization is revealed the conception which his own age held of his character, as well as all that he stood for to Florence and the Italy of that period.

This brief view of the external man may serve to preface a study of the life and works of Marsilio Ficino and a consideration of his place in the great movement of the Renaissance.

INTRODUCTION

In 1439 Eugenius IV transferred to Florence from Ferrara the Council which he had called to discuss the question of uniting the two great branches of the Catholic Church, the Greek and the Roman. This was a question that had come up at intervals ever since the separation,[1] a question that still agitates the Catholic world. On the part of Eugenius, the summoning of the Council was an effort to reinstate papal authority over the Eastern Church and to restore the clerical jurisdiction of Rome over Constantinople.

The Council had been in session for a short time in Ferrara when, chiefly to avoid the dampness and malaria of the region, Eugenius moved it over to Florence. In his train came Joseph, Patriarch of Constantinople; John Paleologus, Emperor of the East; and Georgios Gemistos, the aged and renowned philospher and expositor of Plato: three men who would have been notable in any age or place, who with their numerous retinue brought the flavor of eastern customs and dress into Florence and in many ways gave a new impulse to life and thought. Their picturesque appearance was eagerly seized upon by the artists, and from many a

---

[1]The claim of the Pope to elect the Patriarch of Constantinople in 863 was the beginning of the trouble. The formal rupture took place in 1095 when Leo IX excommunicated the Patriarch. M. Creighton, History of Papacy, Vol. II, p. 173.

wall in Florence and many a canvas they look down upon us today, speaking delightfully of their invasion into the sphere of Florentine Art.[1] Ghirlandajo, Botticelli, Gozzoli and many more have fixed them for us and for all time in color and story, in palace and Church.

At the close of the Trecento, Palla Strozzi had brought to Florence the celebrated Greek, Emanuele Chrysoloras in an effort to make that city the center of Hellenism. And even before his time the demand and desire for Greek manuscripts had brought to Italy from all parts of the East a great number. As early as 1400 there could be found each day in his stall in the Cathedral square a vendor of Latin and Greek manuscripts.[2] The Florentines were not indebted to wandering Greeks or refugees alone for precious documents, as there had already grown up in the city itself an intelligent interest in them and a knowledge of their contents.[3]

In the tenth and eleventh centuries the Greeks in Constantinople had devoted themselves to the study of antiquity as a whole, very much as did the

---

[1]An excellent illustration of this is Benozzo Gozzoli's fresco in the Medici Palace of the Journey of the Magi. In the procession figuring as Kings, attendants, and courtiers are the Emperor, the Patriarch, Cosmo de' Medici, Lorenzo, as a youth, and many other noted men of Florence

[2]W. B. Scaife, Florentine Life During the Renaissance, p. 102.

[3]J. E. Sandys, History of Classical Scholarship, Vol. II, p. 434.

Italian Humanists later, and had preserved for the latter many manuscripts that would otherwise have been lost. The great destruction of these had occurred previous to the ninth century. In the tenth century there were in existence practically all that we have today: Homer, Hesiod, Pindar, the Attic Dramatists, the Pre-Alexandrian historians and orators, Plato, and Aristotle. Some time before the opening of the Quatrocento, it had come to the notice of scholars that many of the precious documents were in the monasteries, and a passion for collecting them arose. The necessity for preserving them, as well as their scarcity, led to the founding of libraries. The study of them developed a new science as well as a general impulse to learning. At times several copies of one original were found, with discrepancies which led to a more careful study and comparison and opened a way to modern textual criticism. Among the first of these critics was Niccolo Niccoli, an ardent collector as well. After his death his library came into the hands of Cosmo de' Medici and formed the nucleus of the great Laurentian Library.

Among the great collectors, by reason of their opportunities and wealth as well as profound love of learning, the Medici rank first. Their followers included a large coterie of men whose time was given entirely to the collating of manuscripts from all over the

known world, and others who devoted their time to translating and copying. In these groups were Giovanni Lascaris, who travelled in the East and recovered 200 Greek manuscripts, 80 of which were unknown in Europe at the time; Vespasiano Bisticci, who acted as librarian to Cosmo and copied an enormous number of manuscripts; Poggio Bracceolini, closest friend of Cosmo, who ransacked the libraries of monasteries throughout Europe, travelling even to England for them;[1] the unprincipled Filelfo,[2] who studied Greek at Constantinople and came to Italy with treasures of manuscripts to sell to the highest bidder; and the Camaldolese monk, Ambrogio Traversari, who brought all of the manuscripts that he could find to Florence and whose cell in Sta. Maria Angeli was the resort of literary men who met there freely to read and discuss them.

All this abundance of manuscripts and their translation aroused intense interest in the study of Greek as well as an enthusiasm for all branches of learning. It may readily be seen then that the great men who composed the Church Council did not come unheralded, to a country or a city ignorant of their language or of the wealth of antiquity behind them. Neither did the

---

[1]Katherine D. Ewart, Cosmo de' Medici, Chap. VIII, p. 223. Bracciolini was a member of the Curia and came to Florence with Eugenius IV for the Great Council. He found many manuscripts in St. Gall.

[2]Mandel Creighton, History of Papacy, Vol. II, p. 341.

overthrow of Constantinople in 1453 initiate or in fact even add much to this phase of Humanism, as has been often claimed.

Cosmo de' Medici at the pinnacle of his power and fame, welcomed right royally these representatives of a past that was at the height of its sway over the newly awakened culture and learning of the West. Among these Eastern leaders, and a member of the Council, was Georgio Gemistos, the aged scholar. The results of his presence in Florence were more definite and lasting than any work which the Council itself accomplished.

Gemistos was born in Constantinople in 1355 and so was 85 years of age at this time. This was not his first visit to Italy, for he had travelled widely in his youth in a search for occult knowledge. Later he had settled in the Peloponnesus where he became a teacher[1] of his own views of philosophy as obtained from extensive study of Plato and the ancients. He had become convinced that spiritually the Greek Church was degenerate, and could be restored only by a new religion and a regenerated philosophy. These he found in a combination of Platonic Philosophy, Mohammedanism, and Alexandrian Mysticism, with but a little of the Christian religion. Such was the man who came to Florence with the Council as

---

[1]Mandel Creighton, History of Papacy, Vol. III, p. 36.

representative of the Greek Church. Fortunately perhaps, he did not attend the council meetings but spent his time lecturing to the admiring and enthusastic Florentines on his semi-pagan theosophy. His eloquence, his age, and his reputation for profound learning inspired the higher minds of the flower of Italian culture with his own passion for Plato. He expounded to them his phase of religion, his view of philosophy which was to absorb all Christianity together with Islam and the Greek Philosophers.[1] The scholars of Florence were fascinated by his exposition of philosophy, though there was no desire for a new religion. Cosmo de' Medici in particular was impressed with the man and his philosophy and took every opportunity of filling his mind with its imaginative yearnings. In his intimacy with Gemistos, Cosmo called him the new Plato and suggested that as the mantle of Plato had fallen on him he should assume the name. Nothing loath, Gemistos did this and so is better known by his adopted name of Plethon.[2] The enthusiasm that Cosmo gained from the lectures and personal intercourse with Plethon inspired him to found an Academy, where the learned men of Florence could assemble to hear this great teacher expound his philosophic doctrines. The

---

[1]Mandel Creighton, History of Papacy, Vol. III, p. 37.

[2]Ibid., p. 36; Encyclopaedia Britannica, Ficino; Sandys, Harvard Lectures on Revival of Learning, Ch. IV, p. 88.

Medici Palace on the Via Larga was at the time a great center of intellectual life: in the gardens were pieces of sculpture, antique and modern, and thither came the students and older artists of Florence to study and work. Here gathered the men of learning to discuss literature and philosophy and hither came all the distinguished guests of the city. It was to this group that Plethon expounded his philosophy. With such a beginning Cosmo conceived the plan of a regularly established Academy, as in Athens of old, where a few congenial scholars could draw together informally for discussion and instruction. Plethon, until his return to Greece, led the discussions, and after that various scholars held the association loosely together. But to assure its more complete dedication to the study of Plato, Cosmo later chose a lad, who, at the time of the Council, was little more than six years of age, to be educated for the position of president of the Academy and to make his life task the translation of Plato's works into Italian. The lad so chosen was Marsilio Ficino. Thus "to Cosmo belongs the special glory of recognizing in the Platonic philosophy the fairest flowers in the ancient world of thought, of inspiring his friends with the same belief and thus of fostering within Humanistic circles themselves, another and higher

resuscitation of antiquity."[1] Cosmo's object in founding the Academy was solely to spread the philosophy of Plato, to which his devotion was intense and pathetic, as he understood it in its Neo-Platonic form. His recreation in his hours of relaxation and his consolation in his last days were found in reading and discussing this scheme of philosophy.

The founding of the Platonic Academy opened an era of similar associations of learned men who met at stated times to discuss and develop the intellectual movements of the time. In quick succession were established the Academy of Pontanus at Naples, of Pomponius Laetus at Rome and of Aldus Manutis at Venice. It is the Academy of Florence, however, that under Lorenzo de' Medici and Marsilio Ficino became world renowned and numbered among its members the leading scholars of Italy and many others from all parts of Europe. Florence was the center of the great movement, for what was truly great and noble in Renaissance Italy found its proper home there; where the spirit of freedom, if only as an idea, still ruled, where the populace was still capable of being stirred to supersensual enthusiasm; and where the flame of the modern intellect burned with its purest, whitest luster.[2]

---

[1] Burckhardt, The Renaissance in Italy, Pt. 3, Ch. VI, p. 220.

[2] J. Addington Symonds, Fine Arts, p. 265.

CHAPTER I

"As the ear, filled with air, hears air; as the eye, filled with light, sees light; so is it God in the soul that comprehends God."[1]

Such is the simple, sincere element of faith, independent of dogma, that even to his old age, with its changed spirit, Marsilio Ficino held. This belief in a higher origin of things is manifest in every part of his writings; he sought for it at every turn of his development; it seemed an inherent part of his nature, which all the sophistry of that study to which his life was devoted could never shake. It was the element of his genius which, perhaps, Cosmo de' Medici, with that keen insight into character for which he was famed, perceived even in the young lad brought by his father to pay his reverence to the great patron of their house. Fresh from his studies of medicine in the University of Bologna, where he was fitting himself to follow in his father's footsteps, Ficino came at the age of 18 to the house of Cosmo, who seems to have recognized at once the unusual intelligence and earnestness of the lad. "What a career is alotted to you in your son," Cosmo is quoted as saying to the

---

[1]Karl Sieveking, Die Geschicte der Platonischen Akademie zu Florenz. "Wie das Ohr von Luft gefüllt, Luft hört; wie das Auge von Licht gefüllt, Licht sieht; so ist es Gott der in die Seele, Gott vernimmt." p. 154.

father, who modestly replied that they planned to make a student of him, if their circumstances permitted. Cosmo then continued, "Thou healest the wounds of the body, yet, to this, thy son, is given the power to be the healer of souls."[1]

This interpretation of character is not so great a marvel as it appears on the surface, for this was not the first time Cosmo had had opportunity of observing the boy. Ficino was born in the year of his great patron's exile, 1433, at Figlini,[2] in the valley of the Upper Arno, and at an early age came, with his father, to Florence, where they became attached to the reigning house of Medici, after the return of its great head from exile. There Ficino gained his elementary education in grammar and Latin literature in the Public High School. As a boy, he showed unusual literary gifts and remarkable facility in acquiring knowledge. All this time he had been, for ten years or so, under Cosmo's own observation. So Cosmo was doubtless justified by facts in his choice of Ficino for the special work to which he called him. Now at the age of eighteen or thereabout Cosmo took the youth into his own house and assumed the task offitting him to carry out a long cherished project of translating Plato into Italian and interpreting

---

[1]Karl Sieveking, Die Geschichte der Platonischen Akademie zu Florenz, p. 153.

[2]K. D. Evart, Cosmo de' Medici, p. 228.

the philosophy therein.

Ficino entered with fervor on this work, so much in accord with his own tastes. He was of tranquil temperament, sensitive to beauty in all its phases, and debarred by ill health[1] from participating in those out-of-door sports that made so large a part of the Florentine life of the time. With no external distractions, he was able to devote himself entirely to that life work which meant so much in the intellectual development of the age.[2] This was the work which the presence of Plethon so many years before had suggested to Cosmo, and a work which the Academy had tried inadequately to accomplish.

Cosmo de' Medici supplied Ficino with the means and opportunity for study. He assigned to him a house in Florence near Sta. Maria Novella and a small estate at Montevecchio near Careggi and not far from the Villa de' Medici at Fiesole and gave sufficient though not abundant means with which to prosecute his studies. There is little data to be found on which to build an intimate biography of the man outside of what we can deduce from a study of his works and more especially of his letters. But

---

[1]Encyclopaedia Britannica, 11th Ed., Vol. 10, Ficino, p. 317.

[2]There seems to be a slight discrepancy or uncertainty about the time at which Ficino was dedicated to this special work. I have chosen what seems to me the most probable age and the one held by the Italian authorities Villari, Capponi, and Billi as well as some of the English, as Symonds in his article in the Encyclopaedia Britannica.

why desire more? His works and letters are the man; he has no life aside from his work. Through them may be gained a definite and clear knowledge of the gentle faithful soul; of the mysticism that tinged his whole thought; a perception of his lack of keen insight into true philosophy; an appreciation of his limitations in the matter of acute analysis; a discernment of his confusion of thought in his attempts to reconcile two opposing schemes of life, and an appreciation of the efforts out of which freedom of thought gains great strength.

Ficino began his study of Plato's philosophy before he learned Greek, and wrote many treatises on it which later he burned when he came in touch with the spirit of the original. He began his study of Greek in 1459, under John Argyropoulos, a native lecturer on the Greek language and literature. After seven years of constant study, he began the translation of Plato's dialogues, a translation which remains today the best in Italian. The manuscripts for his work were supplied by Cosmo de' Medici and Amerigo Benci, while the work itself was the chief interest of the Academy. From time to time, he submitted parts of his work to the Academicians, to Poliziano, to Landino, to Alberti; and these portions became the basis for the famous discussions at their protracted banquets.

In 1477 these dialogues[1] were completed though they were not printed until 1482, when Filippo Valori bore the

[1]Ten of the dialogues only were completed before the death of Cosmo de' Medici, and ten more by the accession of Lorenzo.

expense of publishing. Though Ficino's life was simple and his wants few, his income was too small to admit of the expense of publishing his works. Printing had been introduced into Italy[1] a few years before this and it was still an expensive process. Friends and patrons were not wanting, however, who were glad to help in his great work by bearing the expense of the printing. The work was dedicated to Lorenzo de' Medici and in the preface Marsilio celebrated his intimate connection with three generations of that renowned family.

From Ficino's letters, which he himself collected and arranged in twelve books, may be gained a view of the man and the affectionate regard, nay more, the great esteem, in which his friends held him. The wide extent, too, of his circle of friends may be learned from them. Among these were many well known names: those of Piero Soderini; Carlo Marsupini the Younger; Piero and Giovanni Guiciardini; Bernardo Canigiani; Cardinal Bibiena; Bernardo Rucellai; Pier Filippo Pandolfini; Francia Sassetti Ugolino;[2] all his pupils and deeply attached to him.[3]

Among his more intimate companions were Leon Batista

---

[1]Printing was introduced into Florence in 1471 and by 1500 300 books had been issued from her presses. Geo. H. Putnam, Books and their Makers, p. 329.

[2]Ugolino shared with Ficino a love of music and they often played their lyres together. Among the possessions of the Medici were five organs, in playing which Ugolino was quite proficient.

[3]Alfred von Reumont, Lorenzo de' Medici, p. 26.

Alberti; Ambrogio Poliziano[1] and especially Pico della Mirandola, Cristoforo Landino and Giovanni Cavalcanti. Nor must the three great members of the Medici be omitted from this enumeration of friends. At their homes, Ficino was a frequent and courted guest. His lyre, his songs, his easy witty conversation and his affectionate, gentle nature rendered his companionship a pleasure to all his friends, between whom, as may be gathered from their letters, there was constant rivalry to secure him as guest in their homes. He may be pictured there among them discussing affairs of the world as well as matters of the soul and of the mind up to the last years of his life. He was summoned to the homes of the Medici to share in all their griefs as well as to take part in the great entertainments which they gave. The strength of the tie binding the old man and the youth is discernible in the expressions of tender regard and the longing for his companionship which Cosmo expresses many times in these letters, and he seems never to have tired of listening to the philosophy of Plato and discussing it with his young friend. Piero and Lorenzo continued this affectionate regard with added veneration on the part of the latter as of pupil to instructor. Lorenzo urged him to write to him every day, "for all that comes to thy mind," he says, "is good." The affectionate fatherly interest that Ficino ever

---

[1] A. H. Lybyer, The Revival of Greek in Italy.

exhibited toward Lorenzo is shown in numerous letters of counsel and advice. In one such he says: "In the name of the eternal God, I entreat thee, my dear Prince, to economize every moment of this brief life lest there come over thee vain remorse for dissipation and irreparable harm. Trifling occupations and empty pastimes rob thee of thy true self; they make thee a slave, who art born to be a ruler. Free thyself while thou canst from this miserable servitude; only today canst thou do so, for only today is thine own; tomorrow it will be too late."

His letters give constant evidence of his loyalty to the Medici family throughout his life, in expressions of gratitude and fidelity. He writes Lorenzo, "I had two fathers, one, Ficino 'Medico,' who brought me into the world; the other, Cosmo de' Medici, who gave me new life."[1] Again he says, "I owe much to Plato, to Cosmo no less. He realized for me the virtues for which Plato gave me the conception."

The most intimate friendship existed between Ficino, Cavalcanti, and Poliziano throughout their lives. It is most interesting to read of their lively, gay intercourse in their country homes; Ficino at Montevecchio, Mirandola and Cavalcanti at Querceto and Poliziano at Fiesole. Florence called Cavalcanti, Ficino's "fidus Acates." Ficino called

---

[1] Karl Sieveking, Die Geschichte der Platonischen Akademie zu Florenz, p. 153.

him "my Hero" and Poliziano he called "Hercules." Ficino's interpretation of friendship was "mutual love strengthened by a firm and honest association.[1] To be able to say one was a friend of Marsilio Ficino was a mark of honor.[2]

His letters give evidence of his simple regular habits of life. He rose at daybreak and performed simple religious devotions at which he would sing to his lyre the hymn, "Te, Deus meus, rex," repeating this at midday and again at evening. Then he sat down at his desk for work and allowed no one to disturb him. He did not work longer than two hours at a time but interspersed his work with an equal amount of relaxation with his friends, whom he received freely then, as they came to talk with him and hear his songs.[3]

He was immaculate in dress and person, but in no sense dandified. He was small in stature and graceful in body, although slightly bent in his carriage; halting in speech, lisping the letter "s", a peculiarity which added, rather, to the attractive quality of his conversation. His limbs were long in proportion to his stature; his face was thin, with the subtle emaciation of the profound student, while his expression was sweet and sympathetic. He gave way habitually to fits of melancholy, though never when his

---

[1]Storico antico Italiano, Vol. X, p. 32.

[2]Ibid., p. 29.

[3]Ibid., p. 22.

friends were by. This melancholy he ascribed to the influence of Saturn, as his letters give evidence. In fact his belief in astrology and occultism, colored his life and influenced his thought to a large degree. He always wore a number of amulets, constantly changing them to suit the state of his mind and the trend of his thought. He wrote in all seriousness an article on the influence of the stars on man and nature. He dwelt on the effect of the occult virtues of various semi-precious stones, as agate, topaz, sapphire; he explained the virtues or the malign influence of vipers' fangs and lions' claws. These ideas were not strange to that age nor peculiar to Ficino. The most earnest thinkers of the day were under their influence. Lorenzo de' Medici often tried in gentle railery to shame Ficino out of these beliefs.

To his friends Ficino was always affable and charming, with a face sweet and serene, the outward expression of a sweet and serene spirit, an affectionate and poetic nature.[1]

He loved disputations but was calm and never pugnacious nor irrascible, unless it were on occasions when, overcome by his weakness, he was aroused by too sharp an attack from an adversary. Even then he recovered his habitual calm at once.

His health was most uncertain, since, from his

---

[1] Storico antico Italiano, Vol. X, p. 27.

early youth he had been subject to attacks of indigestion. Many times during his life he yielded to serious illnesses, due to overwork or to excitement. He joked affably about his small size, yet mourned frequently over his ill health and feebleness, and so much illness engendered a fear of every change in his habits or mode of life. "Others," he writes, "seem to have been born to be always well; I to be always ill. I have never known a single day of perfect health."[1] He often states that, were it not for his lyre and the pleasure which he had in music, he could not have endured these attacks of illness and melancholy.

He was affectionate and devoted to all those whom he loved. His father lived with him after his own home was broken up, until the time of his death in the latter part of the year of 1475 and received the most tender care and respect. He was often in difficulties in trying to make the meagre allowance, which had sufficed for his own simple wants cover these added expenses. His tastes were simple and very little sufficed to supply them. He referred to his fortune as slight and humble but enough and equal to his modest desires and the humility of his soul. "Happy," he says, "is he who is content with his lot."

Ficino's friends were by mo means confined to Florence nor even to Italy. His correspondence contains a

---

[1]Storico antico Italiano, from Letters, Book IV.

very large number of letters from admirers in Germany, in France, in Spain, and in England. His relations with Germany began probably at the time of the visit of the Duke of Wurtemburg to Italy, who came on a mission to Sixtus IV and passed through Florence in 1482, where he and his suite were entertained lavishly by Lorenzo de' Medici. In his train came Johann Reuchlin, the eminent Hebraist and philosopher, and Martin Premiger, bishop of Constance. Reuchlin was in constant touch with him to the time of his death, by letters and through the many young men whom he sent to him for instruction. Premiger was, of all the Germans, the most devoted to Ficino, as well as the most congenial. Many letters that passed between them are in existence showing this mutual regard. Ficino sent his works to him as they were issued and dedicated one to him. Premiger sent in return many gifts until Ficino wrote him that he did not wish gold nor silver from him, but affection.[1]

Among his friends were numbered, too, Georg Herrwart of Augsburg; Matthias Corvinus, King of Hungary;[2] Sir Thomas More, Peter Ramus, Erasmus, and Linacre, Archbishop of Canterbury.

By means of these friends his influence spread throughout Europe. The revolt which he headed against

---

[1] Storico antico Italiano, Vol. X, p. 9.

[2] Ibid., p. 11.

Aristotle and the scholastic methods of reasoning became a part of the Reformation. Reuchlin in Germany, Sir Thomas More in England, Erasmus in Paris furthered this work actively by their teaching and more generally by sending their young men to Florence to be directly under his influence.

Many efforts were made to get Ficino away from Florence. Corvinus frequently urged him to come to his court, but could not persuade him to leave his humble home at Careggi and his friends there. Sixtus IV and Innocent VIII made him tempting offers to come to Rome, but his answer was the same, he could not leave his cara fiorentina. He was very comfortable in his little home outside Florence, happy there in the daily companionship of those whom he loved and who returned that love with fervor. He was lacking in worldly ambition. He loved the country and found there the tranquility necessary for contemplation and intimate friendship.

After a brief illness, Ficino died of fever at Careggi in December, 1499, having outlived[1] all of the well known members of the Academy and his most intimate friends. That Florence truly mourned this great man who had done so much to keep her in the front rank of European culture, was evidenced by the state and pomp of his funeral. A resting place was given him in the Duomo and there he was laid away

[1]Karl Sieveking, Die Geschichte der Platonischen Akademie zu Florenz, p. 154.

in the true humanist fashion[1] with elaborate and appropriate ceremonies, in which all Florence joined.

[1] It was customary for humanists to be buried with arms lying across the breast and folded over a book. Some such fashion marks a pilgrim-knight, in that one knee is crossed over the other.

CHAPTER II

In 1458, at the age of twenty-five, Ficino was made head of the Florentine Academy, and from that time to the day of his death in 1499, at the age of sixty-six, he was identified with it and it with him, for it had no life apart from his life.

No knowledge has come to hand of how often it met; of any rules or regulations connected with it; but that it was held together by the teaching and personality of Ficino and was the outcome of the social conditions of the time is evident through all of its known history. It met frequently if not regularly under the patronage of the Medici, down to the troublous times of the Pazzi conspiracy in 1478, when the tranquillity, so necessary for philosophical contemplation[1] was broken and its ranks were thinned. One by one those who were closely identified with it died; Ficino was left alone, the last of the great and brilliant minds who composed that renowned association. With his death it ceased. The gatherings held later under the same name in the Rucellai Gardens had little in common with it. Macchiavelli was the leading spirit there. At these assemblies he read his celebrated disquisitions on Livy and his dissertations on war. In their discussions they soon turned from philosophic ideals to politics and little of Ficino's

[1]Pasquale Villari, Niccolo Macchiavelli e i suoi tempi, Vol. I, p. 70.

aim or spirit can be found in them.

The assemblies of the Academy were held both in Florence, in the Medici palace; and on the heights of Fiesole, either in the gardens of the Medici villa or in the Convent of Camaldoli. The meetings of the leaders of the movement usually took the form of banquets, and the number attending was made to correspond with the nine muses. Some member of the Medici family usually presided; Cosmo before 1459; Piero during the brief time that he was at the head of the state, or Lorenzo, who delighted especially in these philosophical discussions and whose patronage gave to the Academy its greatest period of splendor.

In his Disputationes Camaldulenses, Cristoforo Landino describes many of their assemblies and presents to us in dialog their discussions on the philosophy of Plato, or rather Ficino's interpretation of it. One such that he describes was held during four days in the pleasant convent of Camaldoli, in the summer of 1468, "having met there to enjoy the fresh air and to dispute on philosophy."[1] There were present Lorenzo and Giuliano de' Medici; Cristoforo Landino and his brother; Alamano Rinuccini; Leon Batista Alberti, lately come from Rome, and Marsilio Ficino. The other two, evidently lesser lights, he does not mention by name. After saying mass, they go out into the garden, and

[1]Pasquale Villari, Niccolo Macchiavilli e i suoi tempi, Vol. I, p. 173. These Disputationes are one of the most charming contributions to our knowledge of the life of thought of his times. He brings us into the magic circle of Lorenzo and his friends.

having seated themselves under the shade of the trees, discourse during the first day on the comparative merits of the active and contemplative life. Alberti presents most eloquently the advantages of the former while Lorenzo, no less skillfully, upholds a union of the two as necessary to the perfect life. On the second day they discuss the Summum Bonum. On the third and fourth days Ficino and others demonstrate Platonic wisdom by long dissertations on Virgil, trying to prove that in the Aeneid are to be found, concealed in allegory, all of Christian doctrine as well as Platonic, which to them were one and the same.

At another banquet, in the villa at Careggi, held on the most solemn anniversary of the birth and death - for they are held to have occurred on the same date - of Plato, the seventh of November, 1474, there were grouped about the table Marsilio Ficino and his father; Leon Batista Alberti; Donato Acciaioli; Antonio Canigiani; Naldo Naldi; Peregrino Agli; Giovanni Cavalconti and Alamano Rinuccini. Enthroned on the table and crowned with laurel was that bust of Plato, the discovery of which gave such delight to Lorenzo and Ficino, both of whom are accredited with burning a votive lamp ever before it. After this dinner Plato's Symposium was read and discussed with little originality but always in the line of the philosophy expressed and taught by Ficino: Each one at length transposed Plato's theories of love and beauty into theological terms of angels and

hierarchies. All the curious ideas and strained allegorical symbols that Ficino had worked out in his commentaries on Plotinus were brought forward one after another by the scholars present.

Thus looking forward to their symposia, where they engaged in animated discussion, sometimes diffuse, sometimes profound, but always friendly, the congenial members of the Academy passed the years from 1458 to 1478 under the earnest, pious direction of Ficino.

After this brief description of the intimate gatherings of the Acadimicians, the circumstance must not be overlooked, that besides the purpose for which Cosmo de' Medici conceived and founded the Academy, namely the study of Plato, there was the other aim of providing a place of instruction for those in search of the higher learning. Teopoldi Galeotti tells us that the course of instruction in this small university covered Latin and Italian literature, poetry, and astronomy, as well as philosophy. Among the instructors in 1481 were:[1] Demetrius of Athens, philosophy; Cristoforo Landino, poetry and oratory; Angelo Poliziano, Latin literature; Bartolomeo Fouti, rhetoric; the Buoniucotri, astronomy; Fra Domenico of Covella, interpretation of Dante; Naldo Naldi, classics. In 1472 the Signoria had removed the sciences to Pisa, as offering better facilities for their

---

[1] Archivo Storico Italiano, Vol. 10, p. 4.

pursuit, as well as a more convenient center for the Tuscan scholars.[1] On the walls of the Hall of Assembly was written Marsilio Ficino's favorite motto: A bono in bonum omnia diriguntur. Laetus in praesens. Neque censum aexistimes neque appetas dignitatem. Fuge excessum. Fuge negotia. On the walls in another room was painted a sphere of the world and on either side Democritus, laughing, and Heraclitis, weeping; with the explanation of their action and much good advice for the guidance of life. As for example:- Mortals implore God each day to grant them the good things of life but never ask for wisdom to use them well. They desire that their smallest belongings may be beautiful but of the beauty of their souls they think not at all.[2] Many more of the same nature were on the walls of other parts of the Academy, silent witnesses to the earnest purpose of the leaders and founder.[3]

The spirit of the Academy spread to other cities of Italy and prompted the founding of similar institutions.[4] In fact the second half of this century became an era of the founding of Academies. Pontanus established one at Naples; Pomponius Laetus and Bessarion founded two at Rome;

---

[1]Archivo Storico Italiano, Vol. 10, p. 4.

[2]Ibid., p. 5.

[3]John Colet adopted this custom with others in founding his school of St. Paul in London. He had been an admiring member of the Academy.

[4]Girolamo Tiraboschi, Storia della letteratura Italiano.

Aldus Manitius at Venice.[1] None of these duplicated the work of the Florentine Academy but on the contrary developed individual lines of work.

It was under Lorenzo de' Medici that the Academy became world renowned and included among its members and correspondents the leading scholars of the age as well as the patrons of learning throughout Europe. It is difficult to realize the immense importance attached to this assembly of learned men. The long history of Florence is made up of the narrative of individuals such as these whose lives epitomize and typify the history of the city. In its turn, however, the Academy conferred distinction on Ficino, on the Medici, and on Florence. The city became the resort of scholars from all parts of Italy. The youth of Germany, of France, and of Spain came to attend the lectures of Ficino and to become a part of the renowned Academy of Florence.

1 See Introduction, p. 13.

CHAPTER III

Even among the best of the early humanistic writings is to be found much that is unreadable but none of that character mars the work of Marsilio Ficino. Purity, elevation of thought, and sincerity of purpose mark all that has come from his pen.

The greater part of his work was produced in the Laurentian period of Florentine history. The impulse to the study of Plato and the dedication of his life to that purpose came from Cosmo de' Medici while the actual results appeared during the domination of Lorenzo. So it is rather the spirit of the earlier period brought out and presented with the vital force of the great period of the Medicean age.

Cosmo's main purpose in setting aside the young Ficino for this great task was to bring into general use Plato's works, especially those of a philosophical character. His more extensive plans for the spread of culture and the revival of classic learning were to be accomplished through the Academy. Both of these purposes were united in and accomplished by Ficino. The perfection of the work came under the great patronage of Lorenzo, at a time when the reputation of the Academy and of the men who formed, as it were, the inner circle, had attracted to Florence the learned men from all parts of Europe.

Ficino's translation of Plato's Dialogues is perhaps the greatest service granted directly by him to Philosophy.

After this work of translation was finished[1] he undertook the task of systematizing and popularizing the philosophy contained in it. This brought to him the great work of his life, that of harmonizing Christianity and Platonism. The last twenty years of his life were spent on this mission.

His next great work of translation was rendering the Enneads of Plotinus[2] into Latin, with numerous commentaries and an elaborate preface. It was the eclecticism of the Alexandrian school that appealed to Ficino more than the pure philosophy of Plato. In conjunction with both of these great works he produced his Teologica Platonica[3] de animarum immortalitate, in which may be found more or less fully the substance of Ficino's philosophy. In this he attempted to demonstrate that the philosophy of Plato was a foreshadowing of Christianity and that the teachings of Christ and his disciples were the development of Platonism. Perhaps a more extended study of these works will yield a more systematic scheme of philosophy but the general opinion expressed is that his whole dissertation is but a confused,

---

[1]The publication of this translation so long talked about, created great public excitement and led to superstitious adoration of Plato. Shrines were erected to him and lamps kept burning there. A movement was begun to ask the Pope to canonize Plato and so put him permanently among the Christian saints.

[2]This work was undertaken as a fulfillment of a request of Cosmo de' Medici many years before and was published in 1492 at Lorenzo's expense although a month after his death.

[3]The parchment manuscript of this work was given to Lorenzo and is in the Laurentian Library in Florence. The Greek text of Plato was published at Rome after the translation was issued.

ill - digested jumble of new and old ideas, of mysticism, astrology, Platonism, and Christianity.

This attempt at harmonizing Pagan and Christian ideas was received with great enthusiasm not only in Italy but throughout Europe. Plato was practically a discovery of the Quattrocento and to the Italian mind was most fascinating as the substance of classic learning. The Italian mind turned instinctively to ancient forms of culture with little attempt to classify or distinguish between them.

During the years of his study of Greek he translated the Orphic[1] or Choral Hymns of Plato, which he sang to his lyre for the entertainment of his friends and the mitigation of his melancholy.

Following the translation of the classic doctrine of Plotinus, he translated many other writers of that school.[2] Porphyry,[3] Proclus,[4] Iamblichus, Alcinous, and others, supplementing them with various essays and commentaries on their content.

---

[1]Storico Antico Italiano, Vol. X, Ch. X, p. 25.

[2]The Neo-Platonic School was the last one of pagan philosophy and grew up largely among the Greeks of Alexandria. Plotinus was the founder and his Enneads are the primary and classic documents of the school. For four centuries this was the source of the philosophical teaching of the Church. After the fifth century the Church refused to stand any longer for "heathen doctrines." Plotinus taught his philosophy in Rome in 244.

[3]Porphyry met Plotinus in Rome, became a follower and bitter opponent of the Church.

[4]Proclus was the most systematic and scholastic of all the Neo-Platonists. The works of Plotinus and Proclus had a second revival in the 15th century.

A series of separate writings followed on different phases of philosophy and also a life of Plato. At the same time he entered on a systematic study of St. Paul and an exposition of the Christian doctrines from that great apostle's point of view.

This sort of association of the Greek philosophers, of Plato and Socrates, with St. Paul and the Christian doctrines, obtained greatly in the Renaissance, in all lines of learning and art. One of the most famous representations of this phase of thought is the celebrated "School of Athens" painted by Raphael in the Camera della segnatura in the Vatican. This work was undertaken for Julius II under the more personal direction of Cardinal Guiliano de' Medici, who, later, as Leo X, saw the work finished. The Cardinal had been trained in the Academy under the personal instruction of Ficino and it is even said that the design for this impressive piece of work was one made some years before by Ficino himself for an assembly of the old Academy in Athens. The setting is the impressive forecourt of a Greek temple. Across the picture rises a flight of marble steps leading to the vaulted hall in the background. The whole Greek detail is carried out in perfect architectural harmony. In various groups in the foreground, up the steps and at the top, one may follow the whole course of Greek philosophy. On one side is a group of Stoics, on the other the Epicureans, before us the Pythagoreans and so on, group by group we may study them. But the climax of interest is the two

noble and impressive figures of the composition who represent the old and new philosophy, Plato and St. Paul. St. Paul, in commanding dignity, with uplifted hand has taken his place there among the Greek philosophers, dominating and holding our attention as he does that of the philosophers among whom he has made his way. By his side stands Plato, old, dignified but evidently giving way to the newer philosopher who has come to assume leadership in the great world of thought and speculation. This representation presents the attitude of the Quattrocento and especially that of Ficino as no other single work of the time does. It fulfills and symbolizes Ficino's attitude by its intimate association of all schools of philosophy and types of thought. It reflects the tendencies of the age as all such representations should, but as only the master hand of Raphael can fittingly do. While ranking first among masterpieces of mural decoration as well as of monumental composition, this great work of Raphael's marks the end and climax of the Greek impulse.

Among other works of Plato which Ficino translated, were: Origin of the World; Mercurius Trismogestes and Argonautica. In addition to this work of translating he annotated Virgil and Horace, the Elder Pliny and wrote dialogs in imitation of Cicero.[1]

Besides this work in his study, Ficino gave public lectures, delivered Latin orations, was an assiduous priest

---

[1] John E. Sandys, Harvard Lectures on Revival of Learning, p. 93.

and became a popular preacher, at least among the learned classes.

At the request of Lorenzo de' Medici he translated Dante's de Monarchia into Italian. In the extended work of the Academy, as planned by Lorenzo the study of Dante ranked next to the place given to Plato and for this purpose the translation was made.[1]

Only one whose time was thoroughly and systematically planned could accomplish all that Ficino did in the years he devoted to this work. Freedom from business worries, the assistance and loyal support of his friends, added greatly to the profitable use of his time although social duties and pleasures consumed a goodly portion of his day. Not the least of these diversions was the time spent in writing letters. Nearly every learned or famous man of his time was numbered in the list of his correspondents. These letters he gathered and edited himself, as was the custom of the time. They were published both separately and in one series, and the subjects were by no means confined to philosophy, as expressions of deep regard and affection for his friends, intimate items of daily life, interesting accounts of ceremonies and social occasions of the time render them invaluable historically. In them are mirrored his opinions and motives, his interests and affections with life-like clear-

---

[1] K. D. Ewart, Cosmo de' Medici, p. 229.
Edw. Armstrong, Life of Lorenzo de' Medici, p. 337.

ness. They fill twelve books in all and are dedicated to men of high position at the time, many of them to the Medici, to Federigo Montefeltro, to Matthias Corvinus, and others as well known.

It is readily seen that these works constitute the history of Platonism in the Italy of that period, as his life is the history of the Academy.

After 1491 he translated the mystic theology of the so-called Dionysius the Aereopogite. Doubt had been cast before this time on the genuineness of this work.[1] Lorenzo Valla, a keen critic and antiquarian, but a short time before had written a critical work on the production, holding that instead of a genuine work of the second century, it was rather the work of a much later time, of the fifth century. But these doctrines fitted so well Ficino's system that he accepted them without comment. Lorenzo was dead, the Medici gone from Florence and few of his older friends left. What little pleasure Ficino could get from the philosophy of this writer, whether spurious or genuine, he was entitled to.

The first complete edition of Ficino's works appeared in 1516, thirteen years after his death, and went through the press four times.

---

[1] Alfred von Reumont, Lorenzo de' Medici, Vol. II, p. 20.

CHAPTER IV

The Quattrocento may be regarded as the great period of discoveries. In its opening years comes the awakening from the long period of unconscious outlook upon the classic civilization, when an active revolt against the barbarism which had been brought upon Italy by the Teutonic overthrow, and out of which she was so long struggling, seizes upon this spirit of discovery and turns it toward the past. The great mass of manuscripts, gems, coins, and inscriptions of all sorts not only brought into Italy but recovered from her own soil and ruins supplied material to feed and satisfy this desire. Literary Florence of this period was occupied chiefly with philosophy and art, and all the problems and speculations concerning them. The center of this work, as has been shown, was the Academy, and Ficino was the leading spirit there. His attempt to popularize ancient philosophy and at the same time to harmonize it with the revelations of scripture placed the world of culture and of thought under deep obligations. That it opened the way to results of which he perhaps did not dream, diminishes in no way the value of his work.

In common with other thinkers of the age he believed that Christianity must include philosophy, and to Plato he turned to support such claim. To his thought Plato was an "attic-speaking Moses," a prophet of Christian dogma. In

his search for truth he introduced the new methods which were throwing off the scholastic bonds. He gave his support unequivocally to Plato as against the old adherence to Aristotle.

Ficino recognized the swift decline of morals, the skeptical tendencies, and the dangerous rebellion against authority, which were manifested throughout Italy, as largely due to a misinterpretation of the philosophy so eagerly pursued by the cultured class, a group by no means small in any center of Italy and especially large in Florence.[1] To oppose this, he threw all of his force on the side of maintaining pure beauty and love as expressions of religion as well as of philosophy.

He believed that a study of Plotinus was necessary to an interpretation of Plato. This last school of pagan philosophy, called Neo-Platonic, assembled almost all of the earlier systems and is the consummation as well as the collapse of ancient philosophy.[2] It traces its metaphysics to Plato and through this later interpretation, with its additions of mysticism and superstition, Ficino chooses to work out his own system of philosophy, if it may properly

---

[1]Walter B. Scaife, Florentine life during the Renaissance. As early as 1338 Florence had established public schools for boys and girls, of three grades: one for reading; one for mathematics and arithmetic; and one for grammar and logic. Villari states that in the fifteenth century others were established for instruction in Greek.

[2]Encyclopaedia Britannica, Neo-Platonism, Vol. 19, p.

be called such.[1]

By means of this he explains the relation between the unity and plurality of nature, between the absolute and the infinite, between God and man, and between intelligence and nature. God, the source of all and the ultimate end of all, becomes the great "Source" of Plato. Ficino establishes harmony between the elements of nature, proceeding from this Source and the Christian hierarchy of varying grades of angelic hosts operating between God and man. He identifies Plato's Souls of the spheres with the angels; his punishment of the wicked with the Catholic doctrine of hell; the purification of the spheres, with purgatory; and explains away transmigration with a strained doctrine of eternal life. When contradictions occur which he is unable to harmonize, Ficino sacrifices philosophy to faith, although he often clothes that faith in strange garments, urging that the teachings of Christ and His apostles contain all philosophy necessary for belief and salvation. He claims that as the union of body and soul is necessary at the last day, it must occur to all and so Pagan and Christian alike will struggle through in some way to Heaven by means of the Christian revelation of ancient philosophy.

Not every man of course can accept faith without

---

[1] It seems clear to me that a more extended study of Ficino's Teologia and other treatises will reveal a more definite scheme of philosophy than has been worked up. The marked repetition and uniformity of the commentaries at hand point to such a conclusion.

reason and for those who cannot, Plato supplements with philosophy the doctrines of religion, and the harmony between the two is designed to lead such to Christianity. This he claims was ordained by Providence[1] to bring these doubting souls to the truth. In this particular identification of the two systems lies the cardinal point of his philosophy.

Ficino dwells at length on the multiple nature of the soul, its power of motion within itself forming a link between the senses and the spirit,[2] with the power of purifying or corrupting itself and of furnishing motive power to the will. This he connected directly with the doctrine of penance and purification and rendered that of peculiar value in fighting the sensuous materialism of the age and in restraining the growing skepticism of those who would throw off the authority of the Church.

Ficino's only compromise with the laxity of his age was in the doctrine of love and beauty. These he held to be the reflection of God wherever found and their true function was to draw the soul nearer to Him. The reawakened senses of the Renaissance were rebounding to extremes so that this power inherent in the soul was one to be dwelt upon with fervor and strength. This doctrine too, harmonized in his theory, with the double essence of the soul of

---

[1]Alfred von Reumont, Lorenzo de' Medici, Vol. II, p. 21.

[2]Edward Armstrong, Lorenzo de' Medici, p. 340.

animate bodies set forth by Plato. The great danger of falling into the mysticism and magic and the signs and charms of Neo-Platonism was not always avoided by Ficino himself. The fascination which they held for his aesthetic sense was not covered by even his loyal and devoted belief in Christian dogma and never understood in the deeper meaning of Plato by his followers.

Ficino pushed the unity of nature to an extreme in trying to harmonize all religions and all philosophies and to reduce them to terms of the Christian religion. In his mind the universality of Plato could embrace Aristotelianism, Christianity, and Judaism. This was the first attempt to unify seriously the intelligence of the world and weave into a system all old and new theories and beliefs.[1] Similar attempts had been made before Ficino's time; such as the harmonizing of the theories of Aristotle with the preaching of St. Paul, which Thomas Aquinas undertook in the thirteenth century, and other attempts of a like restricted character; but the attempt to harmonize all religions and all philosophies, which Ficino made, bringing them down through Plato and centering them in the theology of the Roman Catholic doctrines is the first.

This was the work carried on in the Academy and its efforts were directed under Ficino to a unity of thought, of Christian belief and ancient philosophy, de-

---

[1]Mandel Creighton, History of the Papacy, Vol. III, p. 141.

signed to break down the materialism and indifference of the age. Furthermore, the members of the Academy joined actively in a protest against the ignorance of the clergy, into whose hands the ultimate teaching of Christian doctrine would fall.

Mirandola and Landino were the keenest critics and most acute logicians of the Academy and no doubt analyzed the philosophy of Ficino with a clarity of which he was not himself capable. Mirandola was especially interested in Hebraic philosophy and was in close touch with Jewish traditions. Ficino and Mirandola are represented as holding frequent confidential evening discussions with a Jewish doctor[1] on the divine inspiration of the prophets, and studying with him ancient and mediaeval Hebraic lore.[2] Mirandola carried farther the mystic views of Ficino, especially bringing into harmony the philosophy of Plato and the teachings of Moses by means of allegory.[3]

Ficino claimed that all religions were expressions of the yearning of the soul after God or the Source and that Christianity alone showed complete union of man with God through its great revelation. In so much, it was the logical development of ancient philosophy, of Platonism. Wisdom and piety were only different aspects of the same truth and all good and all nobility were but the reflection of divine

---

[1]Storico antico Italiano, Vol. X, p. 25.

[2]Alfred von Reumont, Lorenzo de' Medici, Vol. II, p. 21.

[3]A. H. Lybyer, Revival of the Study of Greek in Italy.

truth thus alone revealed.

One clear aim of his philosophy was to emphasize the duty of man as taught by Plato and to attribute the happiness of the individual and the community to man's common source, God. This, he shows, is taught in Christianity, supplemented by philosophy, and is perfected in the harmony of mortal and divine law. This doctrine he works out in harmony with Plato's theory of government; where the forces of the human race, divine and mortal, are united.

Geiger[1] sums up Ficino's philosophy as both Platonic and Christian though not containing as much of the Christian as of Plato. But in spite of that, Geiger continues, he shows a childlike trust in the Christian faith which he held with firmness together with an unshakable belief in the immortality of the soul.

Savonarola, too, was clearly influenced by the Neo-Platonic school of philosophy and with Ficino discussed these points of resemblance to Christianity. Mysticism, exaltation, and ecstatic absorption in Divinity appealed to him as they did to Ficino. In fact he carried them farther than did the latter philosopher, claiming that the Divine voice spoke directly to him. Later their paths diverged and Savonarola was led through his ecstatic visions to asceticism and to war on the estheticism of Ficino. In the

---

[1]Dr. Ludwig Geiger, Renaissance und Humanismus in Italien und Deutschland, Erstes Buch, p. 115.

one case there arose a union of politics and faith, while in the other there continued the union of philosophy and faith. Ficino has been accused of deserting Savonarola in his hour of need,[1] and it is true that Ficino denounced the course which Savonarola pursued in the latter years of the ninth decade of that great century. He attempted to bring about by means of his philosophy that reform which Savonarola wished to effect with politics and which Luther a few years later precipitated by breaking the unity of faith.[2]

In Italy this superficial and facile study of Platonic philosophy that grew out of the more serious work of the Academy led to a dangerous paring away of ecclesiastic dogma and ultimately in its reaction to a final strengthening and increase. In Germany, on the other hand, it led to

---

[1]Pasquale Villari, in his life of Savonarola, dwells on the intimacy of the two men and their sympathy and delight in companionship. He refers to the great admiration which Ficino expressed for the friar "in the days of his prosperity," as he somewhat bitterly states it; and gives further vent to his partisanship by stating that "after the fashion" of the other learned men he "basely forsook and betrayed him" in his hour of trial. In his zeal to reform all pagan practices in Florence, Savonarola attacked Ficino's beloved Academy; he declared the anniversary banquets were pernicious examples of renascent paganism. But more than this attack on his life work, Ficino deprecated and actively opposed Savonarola's political activities and ambitions. All of this was so foreign to Ficino's philosophy, to his natural inclinations and so aroused his loyalty to the Florence dear to his revered patrons, the Medici, now dead or driven from the city, that it seems rather a case of being forced to deny his support to Savonarola rather than a desertion in the sense in which Villari so bitterly accuses him.

[2]Archivio Storico Italiano, Leopoldo Galeatti, Vol. 10, p. 55.

the rise of a new theology which sought, without the intervention of dogma, to establish a direct consciousness of a relationship between the individual soul and God. Neither of these results, perhaps, was foreseen by Ficino, and neither was in harmony with his elaborately worked out scheme. Certainly the last event was far from his aim or desire. Had it come in his life time one can readily imagine the distress and anguish of the gentle conservative soul, whose life was devoted to the building up of his elaborate combination of Christian and Pagan philosophy, and whose mind never turned from its allegiance to the authority of the Church.

Outside of the spiritual and philosophical harmony of the two systems, Ficino and his co-workers elaborated an allegorical harmony, very extensive in its scope. Mirandola's share has been referred to. Ficino himself found numerous indications of the prophecy of Christ and his doctrine in Virgil and in the writings of the Greek philosophers and he often quotes Plato's reply to the question, "How long will this philosophy endure?" The answer was: "Until the coming of Him by whom the source of all truth will be revealed."[1]

The prophecies of the sybils were used and referred to frequently by Ficino and by others of the period as well. Michelangelo, who was a member of the Academy in his youth, has in his glorious decoration of the Sistine Chapel in the Vatican, put the sybils among the prophets of our Lord's

---

[1]Pasquale Villari, Girolamo Savonarola e i suoi tempi, Vol. I, p. 59.

coming.

As the fifteenth century closed, a new interest arose in the world, an interest in the future which was destined to supplant this absorption in the past. The spirit of discovery turned from delving in musty manuscripts to searching the seas. Lorenzo was hardly dead when Tribaldo de Rossi[1] writes: "A letter has come to the Signoria saying that certain youths, gone out in sailing-ships, have arrived at an immense island, to which never before have any people sailed and which is inhabited by men and women all naked." A new world had been discovered! Ficino lived to see the development of this discovery and whether or not he realized that it was a logical outcome of the new way of looking upon life which his own teaching inaugurated cannot be told. The old ways with their luxuriance of mental development, closed with the Quattrocento as his life ended and made way for the new century of strife and reform.

---

[1]Guido Biagi, Men and Manners of Old Florence, p. 140.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Grant Allen, Evolution in Italian Art. New York and London, 1908.

Archivio Storico Italiano. Il libro di Antonio Billi. Vols. 9 and 10. Firenze, 1851.

Edwin A. Armstrong, Lorenzo de' Medici and Florence in the fifteenth century. New York, 1900.

Guido Biagi, Men and Manners of Old Florence. New York, 1909.

Jacob Burckhardt, The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy. Translated by S. G. C. Middlemore. New York, 1909.

Gino Capponi, Il Rinascemento, Storia di Fierenz. Firenze, 1909.

Mandel Creighton, History of the Papacy. Vol. III. 1887-1892.

Encyclopaedia Britannica, Plethon; Georgio Gemistos. Vol. 11.

Katherine D. Ewart, Cosimo de' Medici. New York, 1899.

Edmund Garratt Gardner, Story of Florence. London, 1903.

Dr. Ludwig Geiger, Renaissance und Humanismus in Italien und Deutschland. Berlin, 1882.

Herman Grimm, Life of Michelangelo and his times: Translated by Fanny E. Burnett. New York, 1897.

Augustus J. C. Hare, Florence. New York.

Adolf Harnack and J. H. Middleton, Neo-Platonism, Encyclopaedia Britannica, Vol. 19.

Edw. Heyck, Florenz und die Medici. Leipzig, 1909.

Edw. Maslin Hulme, Renaissance and Reformation. New York, 1915.

E. L. Horsburg, Lorenzo the Magnificent and Florence in her Golden Age. London, 1908.

M. R. James, Platonic Academy, Cambridge Modern History. Vol. I, Ch. VII.

Sir Richard Jebb, Classical Renaissance, Cambridge Modern History, Vol. I, Ch. 16.

Albert H. Lybyer, Revival of the Study of Greek in Italy.

Dr. Ludwig Pastor, History of the Popes. Vol. 1. St. Louis, 1906.

Adolph Philippi, Florence. Translated by P. G. Konody. New York, 1905.

George Haven Putnam, Books and their Makers. New York, 1897.

Alfred von Reumont, Lorenzo d' Medici the Magnificent. London, 1876.

Wm. Roscoe, Lorenzo d' Medici called the Magnificent. London, 1846.

Vittorio Rossi, Il Quatrocento. Ch. 2 and 7. Milan.

John Edwin Sandys, A History of Classical Scholarship. Vol. 2. Cambridge University Press, 1908.

Walter B. Scaife, Florentine Life During the Renaissance. Baltimore, 1893.

M. Schumacher, Ficino, M., Catholic Encyclopedia. Vol. 6.

Karl Sieveking, Die Geschichte der Platonischen Akademia zu Florenz. Anhang zu seiner Geschichte von Florenz. Hamburg, 1844.

John Addington Symonds, Renaissance in Italy; The Age of the

Despots; Italian Literature; Age of Learning. New York, 1882.

John Addington Symonds, Ficino, Marsilio, Encyclopaedia Britannica. 11th edition. Vol. 10.

Girolamo Tiraboschi, Storia della letteratura italiano. Vol. 6. Milano, 1833.

Wm. Turner, Neo-Platonism, Catholic Encyclopedia, Vol. 10, p. 742.

Wm. Turner, Plethon; Georgio Gemistos, Catholic Encyclopedia. Vol. 12, p. 166.

Wm. Turner, Ficino, Catholic Encyclopedia. Vol. 6.

Pasquale Villari, Niccolo Machiavelli e i suoi tempi. Milano, 1912.

Pasquale Villari, Girolamo Savonarola e i suoi tempi. Vol. 1. Milano, 1912.

UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS-URBANA
3 0112 086832331